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AB 1976 - 911 ABUSE

PURPOSE

Increases the penalties for anyone who knowingly allows the use or who uses the 911 telephone system for any reason other than because of an emergency.

SUMMARY

False 911 calls are occurring at such a high rate that 911 call centers are having trouble responding to legitimate emergencies. In some circumstances, call centers face a back-log on their phone lines. False 911 calls are not only illegal but also reckless and dangerous.

AB 1976 would strengthen the current punishments for illegal 911 calls through: creating a minimal \$50 fine for the second offense; the third offense would be a \$100 fine; the fourth and any subsequent offenses would be a \$250 fine.

BACKGROUND

There are about 500,000 calls to 911 in the United States every day, about 183 million every year. Based on information provided by CHP, between 1.8 million 3.6 million are non-emergency 911 calls. In California, the 911 calls made from cellular phones are

answered by the CHP. When call volume increases substantially, up to 37% of cellular phone calls made to the CHP go unanswered. CHP answers over 8 million wireless 911 calls annually.

Under current law, offenders are given warnings for the first two offenses, fined \$50 on the third, \$100 on the fourth, and levied a \$200 fine for the fifth and every subsequent offense thereafter. Our current two-warning system does not effectively deter non-emergency 911 calls. False 911 calls are a serious threat to public safety that merits a serious response. A one-warning approach will better deter this dangerous behavior by more immediately imposing significant sanctions upon illegal callers.

Some of these calls are organized efforts, independent pranks or jokes and some stemming from individuals who believe that 911 is their personal concierge service. Many of the calls are complaining that their burger or pizza was made the wrong way. All of these calls pile up and can create a dangerous back-log in the 911 system.

As of 2004, according to the California Highway Patrol they receive around 8 million calls per year; 800,000 of which are for non-emergency calls. The San Diego Sheriff's Department reported in 2001 that

more than 50% of its 911 calls were frivolous.

The California Highway Patrol has created a non-emergency number for use within California. Individuals are encouraged to call their local law enforcement's non-emergency number or to call 1-800-TELL-CHP if they are on the State's highways.

AB 1976 would take away the second warning and give discretion to the respective law enforcement agencies on whether the call was accidental or lead to a dangerous situation. With this proactive approach in use, we will let possible serial offenders know that their actions will not be tolerated because the fines are recorded through the court system. This legislation will ensure that the state no longer loses track of phantom callers; and those who continue to make illegal phone calls to 911 will be held responsible for the costs that they inflict.

The difference between a few moments can be the difference between life and death when it comes to emergency response. A fast and efficient 911 system is critical to the public's safety. AB 1976 will help to ensure that when Californian's call 911, they do not get a busy signal!

SUPPORT

California State Sheriffs' Association
Los Angeles County District Attorney
National Emergency Number Association
Los Angeles County Sheriff
San Bernardino County Sheriff